

Old Skool Games

Bringing the gaming past to the present

SCORE 500
PLAYER 
ENEMY 



STAGE 1- 2
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CastleVanina: Bloodlines
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Super CastleVania IV
Super Mario RPG
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
Zero The Kamikaze Squirrel

Old Skool Games Exclusive!

OSG sits down for a one on one
with Steve Snake, to discuss his
work on his emulator,
Kega Fusion

Featured Review CastleVania Bloodlines



Super Mario RPG



Shadow Dancer



Issue #2
April 2005

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OOPS!

Does something not look right?
Did we goof up a hero's name?
If you see an error, let us know.
[E-mail](#) us.

COVER STORY

CastleVania: Bloodlines



At Old Skool Games, we appreciate the hard work of our staff. Every issue, we list the names of all the people who have worked hard to make every word you read enjoyable.

Want to help?

If you are interested in submitting a review just check out the info [here](#).

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Oops!

Sometimes at Old Skool Games we make mistakes. Lucky for us we have readers with keen eyes. On page 8 of Issue #1, in our Base Wars review, there was a paragraph repeated twice. We're sorry this error occurred and we apologize to the readers.

* Writing and editing assistance provided.

Legal Stuff:

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Kega Fusion: An Old Skool Games Exclusive...

Zach sits down with Kega Fusion creator, Steve Snake

This issue, we will be talking with Steve Snake, the developer behind Kega Fusion; one of the best all around Sega emulators on the planet. To keep things simple and easy to read, OSG will be represented in **bold**, and Steve in *italics*. Though Kega Fusion emulates *many* systems this interview has been confined to its Sega Genesis capabilities.

Steve, perhaps you could tell us a bit about yourself? What do you do for a living?

I've been a professional games programmer all my life.

Where are you from?

The U.K , but just recently I was forced to move. My advice to anyone wanting to work in the games industry? Don't...

What got you into emulators and emulator programming?

I've always liked the idea of emulation. I started writing a Sinclair Spectrum emulator on the Amiga way back in 1986, but never finished it. It's something I'd been meaning to do for years, and when PCs got as fast as 200mhz, I thought I could do something pretty powerful with it, and decided it was about time I did.

Perhaps you could give us a little history of Kega Fusion? Why Sega?

Quite simple really. The MegaDrive / Genesis was one of my favorite consoles, and I've always liked most of the games that Sega has created.

Is Kega Fusion based off your past projects?

Not really, no - apart from the fact that I learned a lot about the various bits of hardware while developing my past projects. Some of it is similar, but...

How did Kega Fusion develop into its current form?

Basically I decided it was time for (another) rewrite. After I lost the code for Kega, I set about trying to rebuild it as quickly as possible - this became Kega Lazarus. Although there was nothing actually wrong with Lazarus, because of the fact I'd written it in a hurry, there was a lot of it that was a bit messy. Not that it matters to any-

body but me, and indeed there are a lot of programs that are far messier . But I like my code to be tidy, and if its not, it bugs me to the point where I don't want to mess with it anymore. And there was still a LOT of stuff I wanted to add.

It's all a bit annoying really. If I hadn't had to rebuild for Lazarus, who knows where the project would be now - I'd actually started adding 32X support to Kega before I lost the code, and at the time, Stef had no plans to add 32X support to Gens. Ah well, its all history now, and I'm much happier with the current code base.

Do you have any really cool features set in stone, for future releases?

I do - some really BIG stuff - but I don't want to comment on it just yet. I don't know when I'll have time to even work on it. As you can probably imagine given my current situation (i.e. VERY much in debt, VERY busy and with NO equipment...) things are a little difficult.

What language is Kega Fusion programmed in?

Mostly ASM. There is some C in there to do things like the windows menus, file loading, etc. But all the emulation code is ASM. A lot of people think that ASM is unnecessary these days. These people should try writing a 32X emulator...

How does plugin support work? I think I heard people can write their own? Is that correct?

That was the idea, yes. We already have pretty much every useful plugin (and some bizarre ones) now though, so I don't know what else will be done. I'll be putting together an official plugin pack at some point.

How often do you suspect Kega Fusion will be updated?

It will be updated whenever I get the time and the motivation to work on it. I can't really say any more than that.

Programming an emulator is no doubt, a lot of hard work. Do you ever get burned out? How do you deal with it?

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Yea, sure I do. Apart from the stuff I already mentioned, what makes me want to / not want to work on it? People.

At least 50% of the things that I put into Kega are not things that I particularly want or use. There's loads of stuff in there already that I never use. I do this stuff because people ask me to. But if I keep getting requests for features that really aren't of any use, or people complaining to me because I haven't done something exactly the way they want it, or people saying that it "needs" this or "must" do that - that doesn't tend to make me want to work on it.

As I've said before, countless times now, I'm not in competition with anybody. I just want to make the best emulator I can. But if nobody is using it, then I'm wasting my time - and I put a LOT of time and effort into what I do. I don't think many people realize this. The authors of Ages, Gens, and Xega were all unemployed when they wrote those emulators. I've never had that kind of free time. Yet I spend every free moment working on stuff like this. Maybe you can understand why I might be seriously unmotivated if nobody uses it.

So this is why I get annoyed when I see things on popular emulation related sites, giving Gens a ten out of ten rating, and Kega Fusion only six out of ten. It doesn't take a genius to realize that's completely wrong and misleading. Stef himself called Kega Fusion "The Ultimate Sega 16-bit emulator". It should be obvious that Kega currently does more than Gens.

It runs more games, it has more features, it is more accurate in many ways. It's faster... In fact there is not a single game, to my knowledge, that runs in Gens that does not run in Kega Fusion - whereas there are several that run in Kega Fusion that don't in Gens, and a few others that run more correctly. Yet because of sites like this (emulator rating sites), people don't even try Kega Fusion.

In fact, people would rather remove important security updates, and even IDE drivers, (because Gens is incompatible with them) than try Kega Fusion, which doesn't have these problems. In my opinion this is a very, very bad idea. But people trust what they read on a website...

So yes, the "bad review" thing bothers me, but more because of the fact that it prevents people from even trying my emulators. That and the fact they are hideously inaccurate. C'mon, at the very least Kega and Gens should get the same score. And then maybe people

would use, or at least try, both.

On the other hand, sometimes people say interesting or nice things, or come up with a really good idea. That motivates me to work again. Gerrie and Stef are good at motivating me too, and I'd like to think I do the same for them.

Wow! That certainly was a mouthful. I hope everyone reading understands what you are saying, because you make some very good points. Now how about addressing the issue of ISO/MP3 support in Kega Fusion? A lot of people want it, and they want to know why you won't support it.

Ok, back to the point above. There is already a lot of stuff in Kega that I don't use or want in there, but its in there anyway, because people want it. So just because I don't want something does not mean it won't get in.

Personally, I don't like ISO/MP3 rips. A lot of people say that the sound quality is bad - well personally I don't agree with that, an MP3 encoded with the right tool sounds good enough to me. That's not really the problem. Even if you are very careful, it is not possible to produce an MP3 file that is exactly the same length as a CDDA track, because the frame sizes do not match up. An MP3 file will always be slightly longer than a CDDA track. On top of that most software will introduce extra silence into an MP3, making things go out of sync. But above all else, using MP3 tracks means the data differs from the original - and that's what I, along with several others, were trying to promote - preserving these games in such a way as to be exact duplicates of the originals. More people applauded me for adding BIN/CUE support (nobody else supports it) than complained at the lack of MP3 support, in fact.

However, I've always said that I would consider it IF the following problem could be solved: it's actually illegal to include an MP3 decoder unless you've paid a license for it. Now, as this license doesn't come cheap, and Kega is free, I'm not going to do that. But none of the people who were complaining about lack of MP3 support came up with a solution. The solution is quite simple: if I can decode MP3s without having any MP3 decoding code in my program itself, then I can do that without any legal trouble. It would be up to the end user to provide whatever external decoder was needed. But nobody seemed to want to help me find this solution. Guess I'll just have to solve it myself. It seems that preservation is fighting a losing battle, after all.

Well don't worry Steve, you have my support on BIN/

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CUE. Lets move on though. You boast about Kega Fusion's compatibility, could you elaborate on that a little further?

It's not really a boast - if you make an emulator 100% accurate in every way, then every game will run. That's what I'm aiming for. It's not there yet, but its very close, closer than anything else. Getting it there was a huge effort, but worth it, I think.

I know quite a few game bugs have been fixed already. Extending upon that thought, do these bugs happen as a result of the emulation core (cpu, sound, etc), or are they usually game specific ?

There's always the chance that I missed something, I don't have enough time to write this stuff AND test it thoroughly... But, they are usually down to the game itself doing something it shouldn't be doing. There are guidelines for developing on consoles, but some games break these guidelines. Some games just do very silly things. Even on real consoles, when you do this, proper operation cannot be guaranteed. But these bugs were either not noticed, or didn't occur very often, and so slipped through testing.

It is also true that most hardware will do unexpected things if you do unexpected things to it. These are things that the hardware wasn't designed to do, and is completely undocumented. It is not really a good idea to do things like this in games, because there is a chance that it will break on some systems / later versions. But people do it anyway.

Of course they can usually be fixed by making slight changes to the emulation core to cope with whatever the game is doing. In theory if these problems can slip by on real hardware, they should slip by under emulation too.

What's on the table for the next Kega release?

Wait and see...

What's your favorite Sega game?

Ugh... I don't know, there's loads of great Sega games... Outrun 2 and Rez were taking up most of my time before I had to get rid of my consoles.

Some people have commented that your color palette of choice for the Sega Genesis is "darker" than other emulators, can you address this issue ?

That doesn't make "other emulators" right, TVs display brighter images than PC monitors - it looks correct via TV Out. I'll be adding some sort of brightness control at some point anyway, so it's not an issue.

There have also been some reports of controller problems (certain ones not working, 6-button buggy), do you have anything to add about this ?

Certain games are not supposed to work with 6 button controllers, and so when you run them with 6 button controllers enabled, strange things happen. This is a problem with the original games, and not the emulator. Some people believe this is a problem with Kega because "it doesn't happen in Gens" - when in fact the reason for that is that Gens does things differently than the real hardware, and is therefore wrong.

There were a couple of problems - one fixed a long time ago, which meant that 6 button controllers might not be detected correctly if your PC was very slow and did a lot of frameskipping. I found one more recently that affected only one game, because of the VERY strange way this game tried to read the controller. But these problems are fixed, and I am not about to "fix" other "problems" that were never broken in the first place. Kega supports many different emulated peripheral devices, and most games only work with one or two of them. If a game gives you input problems, try it with a different emulated peripheral. That should be obvious.

Before we let you go, is there anything we can do to help support Kega Fusion?

Use it! Buy the T-Shirt!!

Old Skool Games would like to thank Steve for making himself available to answer many of our questions. Kega Fusion has been a great emulator to play with in many aspects, and we wish Steve the best and we also hope to see future development of his emulator, for a long time to come...

| Kega Fusion Info |
|---|
| Home Page: Eidolon's Inn |
| Latest Version: 3.2 |
| Author: Steve Snake |
| Emulates: Sega SG1000 Sega SC3000 Sega Master System Sega Game Gear Sega Genesis Sega CD Sega 32X |

"The Golden Age"

Has it really been that long?

Fade back to 1996 and 1997 for a moment. The Internet seemed all so young back in those days, even though it had been around for quite a few years prior, it didn't really take off with the public until the mid to late ninety's. A lot of us were just getting started on the 'net, and some of us had been around the block for a while now, but off in a few remote corners a new fledgling community was beginning to gain notoriety... Emulators were starting to come to the masses, and boy were we ever excited!

Now I am not claiming to know the exact date and time that the genesis of emulation, or its popularity began, however I will say that however long it had been around at that point in time, things were beginning to radically change out on the great homestead that was the Internet during '96 and '97. We were the generation that would lead hundreds of more kids after us into the age of the digital playground, with infinite possibilities and adventures awaiting many of us.

I, like many others, recall this period as "The Golden Age", when everything on the net was new and young, more and more sites were popping up everywhere along with new technologies and ideas that would propel the Internet full throttle into the head of the technology pack. There were tons of things to easily entertain us, from chat rooms to some of the earliest forms of multi-player games, to quirky HTML and soon to come JavaScript tricks that would make us sit back and say "whoa"...

Then one day the Internet changed. Something new was happening, something very exciting, word was buzzing all around the net that you could play games like Super Mario Bros, on your very own home computer! I'm sure there were probably quite a few skeptics back then, but myself and everyone I knew were nothing less than ecstatic about this information. Pretty soon words like "emulator" and "ROMS" started popping up around the 'net in more popular circles, followed quickly by sites where you could download these emulators, and look at screenshots of and download ROMS, digital images of the very games you grew up on, fresh for the taking, free games for the masses.

Emulation had a pretty slow start for those of us with lacking computers, I myself was still on a 386 at this point, with a measly 4 megabytes of ram. It's a far cry from the computers of today, but even as slow as it was,

it was still slightly good enough for me to enjoy the games I used to love but not longer owned. Nesticle was king back then, it was the best looking and most useful NES emulator for a long time, even today some say it is superior in many ways. There were also other emulators floating about, MAME, Genecyst, Kega, there were System 16 emulators, emulators for almost every piece of hardware you could imagine were slowly cropping up. There had been emulators before them, but not emulators like this, it was becoming a whole new ballgame.

Dedication

I think these were the years when we were most dedicated to emulation, we eagerly watched various sites for news of an update or new emulator to try, we cruised places like the now defunct emux.com, snagging up all the ROMS we could get our hands on. We were even excited about Stella, and Atari emulation... It's hard to believe sometimes, but you could type in "NES ROMS" in your favorite search engine, and secure a plethora of links to sites serving all kinds of ROMS, download links that actually worked; and then one day it happened.

The Crackdown

The law began to catch up with us, we were asking ourselves if it was really legal to download games, we were asking if it was correct to even dump them. The line of division had been drawn in the Internet sandbox, and two armies were gathering on each side. The corporation stepped up to the plate, the lawyers started buzzing, and for an unfortunate few, life was about to drastically change. There were three main groups people belonged to back then. There were the hardcore champions of emulation, those who wanted to say "to hell with the law!" and wanted free ROMS everywhere, then there were the more conservative champions of emulation, those who believed in emulation and wanted to keep it legal, but knew ROMS were bad to distribute and endorse emulators with.

They wanted nothing more than to preserve the hardware platform, and provide a method for playing preserved digital images of software for that platform. This is the stance most emulator authors have taken throughout history, and rightfully so. The last group were the legal lapdogs, some of them simply made their opinion known that they believed downloading and sharing

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ROMS was wrong, that you should only be entitled to a backup if you own the original product, and make that backup with your own personal equipment. As far as I know, this is the only way to legally own a ROM, unless you have permission from a copyright holder to obtain and store that ROM by other means. Doing research on the legal ramifications of ROM ownership does indeed produce murky results, however through my own research I came to the conclusion that a person should only legally be entitled to a backup if they dumped it themselves from the original, using their own hardware. I also have a suspicion that in many cases, the dumping hardware may be illegal.

I honestly cannot say what the absolute definition of legal ROM ownership is in the eyes of the law, and I do not want anyone to be misled by the opinion that I have shared. Since the big crackdown, things have been pretty dicey in general, but I am pleased to say that it looks like emulators in themselves appear to be free of any legal repercussions. I feel at this point, emulation did however take a severe nose-dive. Pretty soon all the ROM sites began turning up dead links, most of them were getting shutdown, and in some cases lawsuits were being filed. There have been a few sites out there over the years that have indeed survived the period, generally unscathed, but I surmise that to be more a circumstance of server location; as many of you may know, some of the biggest ROM sites reside in countries other than the USA.

Lack of Community?

"The Golden Age" was a great time, for a lot of good reasons. A lot of good emulators have come out of that age, but one thing that severely disheartens me, is the apparent lack of community spirit you find today. The emulation community has seen a drastic change in the recent years since the big crackdown, with more and more younger kids getting into emulation, mainly because of things like Nintendo 64 and PlayStation emulators. I do not hold malice towards the authors of these emulators at all, but I am deeply concerned about their core demographic. These days people show up on forums, speaking barely literate forms of English (in most cases when English is their primary language), wanting immediate results, and answers to all their questions. They show no tact at all, they show no respect for those who run forums, they show no respect for the rules of these forums, for example, requesting ROMS when rules specifically forbid such things... The list can truly go on and on my friends, and I feel like it is only getting worse.

There are some very bright individuals out there, who

are quite junior to many of us, but at the same time these individuals are few and far between. I hope that any who happen to be reading this are not entirely offended by my remarks of their age group, and that they can understand what I am trying to point out. I also think its important to point out that it is not just the younger crowd, I have visited many sites over the years and participated in many forums, seeing both infantile members and developers alike. Whether it is the forum idiot bad-mouthing an emulator because it lacks something he sees as cool, or whether it is the screaming developer who insists he shuts down his project because people dare to criticize his work; I have a message for you. Grow the hell up, you are doing nothing to help the scene, and we don't need you. You do however, need us.

There are many great people out there, and I think you guys do a fabulous job when you work together and help people out with support issues and other emulation related stuff. But you've got to take a look around you for a moment, look at the people you are helping and ask yourself if its worth it? I am not telling you to refuse to help incoherent, ungrateful sounding people. I am simply saying help them out a little more than with what their question is, teach them the good things about being involved in the emulation community. Teach them some decent posting abilities, teach them a little common courtesy, be it a gentle nudge or an ill received spelling / behavior lesson.

It kind of seems like a grandiose, or even selfish dream to have on my part. But helping others better themselves and emulation go hand in hand, at least in my book. I remember some of my earlier days as an emulation novice, I did a lot of things wrong, but I had a lot of good teachers and friends to help me along the way. There are many forums alive and kicking these days, but the main problem with these communities is they are dispersed, and they are often quick to chastise an outsider if they do or say the wrong thing. Being dispersed into small groups and tight-knit communities is not at all a bad thing; it is when those tendencies lead to closed doors, perform and demand relationships with emulator developers, and an overall foreign feeling to a new forum browser, it is when these things occur that it becomes a problem.

Final Thoughts

This started out as a simple article about remembering ones roots, but has instead morphed into an op-ed of a rather unforeseen subject matter on my part. I can't necessarily take back what I have said up to this point, nor is it my intention to do so. I believe that once I have

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something written down, it usually isn't going to look better if it were chopped up, added onto, or otherwise modified. I really like where the article ended up in this respect, as I think that the community is a very important aspect of maintaining successful emulation endeavors.

Look, we're not all perfect, I'm not, you aren't, the developers aren't, and I'm not trying to scold anyone. Its just my humble opinion that the community isn't what it once was, be it through neglect on our own part, or through the natural passing of the times. There are great forums out there, and you guys should be proud, but at the same time there are a lot of not so great communities that could really stand to better themselves, which in turn will better us all. Nothing is going to revive "The Golden Age", but that's no reason to let everything else go down the drain either.

ZACHARY BARTELS

EMUX circa 1996

RETROCADE 1.1 RELEASED!

Lots, lots of updates and fixes, as well as support for 6 new games. These are Bosconian, Dig Dug, Galaga, Power Drive, Max RPM and Missile Command. Some of these are already on EMUX.com, but I will be verifying that later today.

Last updated December 4th; 12:50 PM EST

NEW! A new version of z26 (Atari 2600 emulator) has been released. Version 1.21 is now more configurable, you no longer need to type a ROM's .bin extension and a graphics glitch was fixed.

EMUNews A new Retrocade is coming...stay tuned.

Last updated December 3rd; 12:50 PM EST

NEW! MacMAME, PentiumMAME and AMAME have all been updated to BETA 8.

EMUNews Support for two new games have been added to the next version of RAINE. These are The Combatribes and Puchi Carat, which is a cross between Puzzle Bobble and Arkanoid.

NEW! A new PSEmu Pro BETA has been released. This new version fixes more GTE related bugs.

Other emulators...

Console Emulators

Atari 2600

Atari 5200

Atari Lynx

Coleco Vision

Game Boy

Game Gear

Intellivision

N64

NEO*GEO

Nintendo (8-BIT)

Odyssey 2

Sega Genesis/Mega Drive

Sega Master

Sega Saturn

Nesticle, the most popular NES emulator ever

File CPU View Settings Misc

About

NESTICLE DOS

WATCOM C++ 10.60 JUL 6 1998 21:55:59

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OK

Genecyst, one of the earlier Genesis emulators

File View CPU Settings Sound Misc

Input

Resolution 256x224

Frameskip 256x240

Vsync 256x256 F11

Timing... 320x200

DMA fix 320x224 F12

Force display 320x240

H-Interrupt enable 384x257

Raster effects 640x400

Auto-Version 640x480

Version OTHER...

6 Button

Double Dragon II - The Revenge

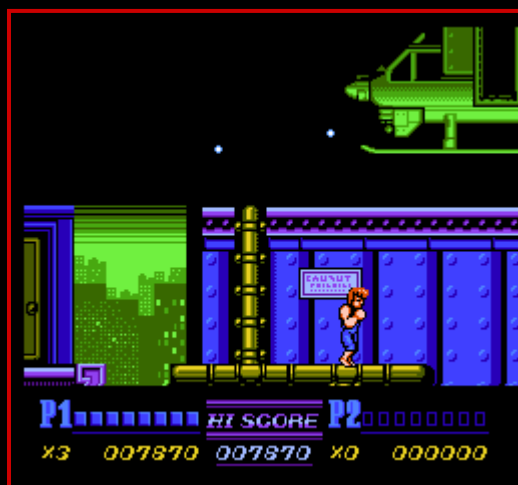
Everything about Double Dragon II is right. Yet another game I had the pleasure of playing during early childhood, it encompasses a lot of the good things about beat'em up's. From the start of the first level it establishes the story, the characters, the setting, and the challenge. I would probably say this has always remained my favorite Double Dragon game to play because of its sheer simplicity, and the upgrade it got compared to the first Double Dragon on NES. That's not to say the first Double Dragon was bad looking, I just feel it didn't play as well as its sequel does...

The game boasts a very good soundtrack, which helps a lot to establish the various moods it tries to invoke during the course of play. Even the title screen on this one is great! I actually think the soundtrack is one of the strongest aspects of the game, which is pretty unusual for an NES title. That's not to say that the NES usually boasted horrible music, just that most games never really "hit the chord", so to speak.

The game starts you off in a city, in the not too distant post-apocalyptic future, and it literally throws you into a fight; you are greeted by two punks looking to kick your ass hardcore. I liked this stage the most out of all the others both because of its inner city warehouse feel, and because of the way it sets up progression inside the stage itself. I can't recall many beat'em up's that have you navigating in more directions than left and right, but Double Dragon does it beautifully. Whether you are taking a short jump off a piece of land, scaling a ladder or drain pipe, or climbing around a moving object, you won't feel disappointed at all. I also enjoy the fact there are active obstacles in most stages.

Double Dragon II is another good example of a game that starts out relatively easy, but gets harder as you progress through the different stages. Stage 1 is essentially an introduction to combat, and you deal with relatively few enemies at one time, while learning how to go up against bosses. The boss at the end of the first stage is pretty interesting actually, he seems to have the ability to disappear and reappear, but I don't know what the designers were trying to accomplish with this, as he does everything while standing in the same spot.

I wouldn't exactly call the game itself revolutionary, as it is really the same as every other beat'em up ever made. At times the controls can often be frustrating, especially when trying to do more powerful moves. To start with you have to press A and B at the same time to make your character jump, and once in the air if you hit them both again you can usually pull off a spinning kick attack. Its a pretty cool attack, but at the same time it can be frustrating when you appear to be hitting the buttons at the proper time and nothing happens. I don't know if its an issue with the game itself, or if the players' nerves and timing play a large part in this. There is also another neat attack that suffers from the same problem, where you can do some sort of flying knee kick into an enemy. I honestly have never been able to "master" this move, and am still not sure what triggers it. I do know it can be trigger both while getting up (after being knocked down) and while standing upright...



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Another special attack you can pull off is a nasty uppercut move. You can jump towards your enemy and then hit the punch button to do an upper cut, and you can sometimes pull one off while getting up after being knocked down. Overall you may find the controls to be a little confusing however, as the punch and kick buttons change with the direction you are facing. I found this to be stupid personally, and combined with the issues of hitting two buttons to jump, and having little control over your jump distance and landing, can really be frustrating. It becomes a severe annoyance when you get to the later stages that require jumps of exact placement and distances.

Double Dragon II is not by any means a poor game, it just has it's quirks. Overall you will find the music to be pleasant, and though the control takes some getting used to, it will also feel better over time. There are plenty of obstacles in the game for you to combat, and you will also need to develop a few strategies for different enemies. The one final complaint I have about Double Dragon II is the end of the game. There are three difficulty settings in single player mode, one lets you play the first few stages as a "training" experience; the next one up lets you play all the way to the end, but denies you access to the ending, and the third I have never seen personally. The enemies on the hardest setting are definitely a challenge for the seasoned Double Dragon II veteran. Overall you should have no trouble playing and enjoying the game, and I recommend it to everyone.

ZACHARY BARTELS

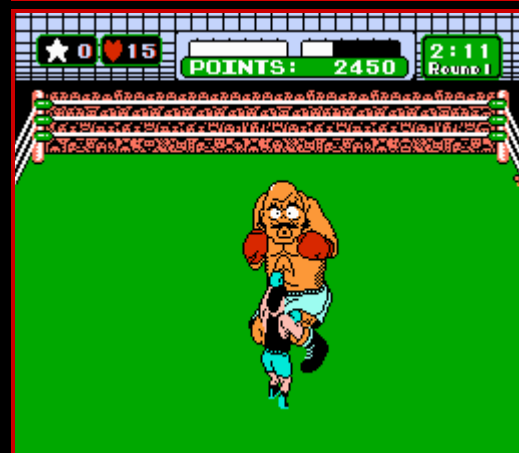
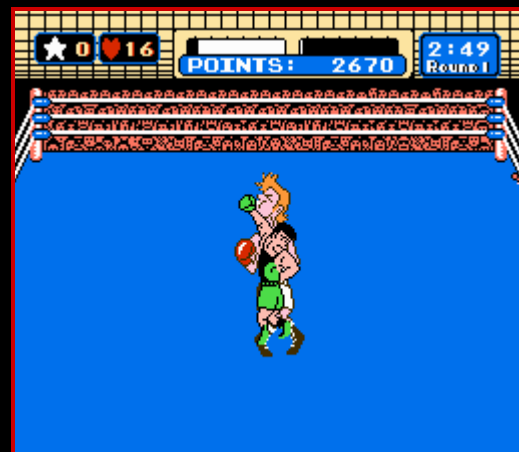


Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!

In 1987 Nintendo released this great boxing game. It's about an amateur boxer called Little Mac, from the Bronx in New York. He is only seventeen years old, but his courage and determination exceeds many expectations, and he is soon pitted against some of the very best boxers out there! Most of his opponents are twice his size, much heavier than he is, and you are sure to be in for a good challenge. It's to be expected that the first few tries you take, you'll most likely experience a nasty TKO and suffer a devastating defeat, but don't worry because soon you will be boxing as good as the rest of them. With a little practice and a lot of luck, you'll be going through all ten opponents in far less time than the allotted three rounds, and be on your way to victory in no time!

The game itself is pretty amazing the first few times, and I love how a small guy such as Mac can confront all his giant opponents, and then go on to defeat them in an intelligent way. Your best strategy will be to dominate the controls and learn all of Mac's movements and attacks as soon as possible, but don't worry, there aren't that many to remember. One thing you will definitely need to master is hitting the A and B buttons really fast at the same time, in case you get knocked down.

The graphics were really impressive, even though there is only one ring with a few different colors, they did a great job with the characters. They all have some pretty cool animations and were done in pretty unique ways, making their special moves all the more incredible. I especially liked how each character had their own personality, and the various taunts they used to try and lower your confidence in-between



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rounds. A big part of the challenge is learning how your opponents' moves work, and then mastering the timing so you can dish out an attack stopping sucker punch.

Personally, I liked the fight with Super Macho Man, he is the second hardest fighter in the game and sometimes it can be a challenge defeating him. After a few strong upper cuts, he attacks with the super spinning punch, trying to land between one and eleven hits on your poor flabby body. You will have to keep dodging all the attempts as he spins around, but if you dodge them all, you'll get a nice chance to give him a bunch of hits in return.

Concerning the fight with Iron Mike, you'll have to be careful at the beginning, because with one single blow he'll make you fall. You have a nice chance when he goes back and stays still, hit him up to get a star, then there is a moment when he is stunned giving you a nice chance to apply the star. The music is a little boring as well, you can only hear one tune in all the fights, but it's really not a bad thing, since you are too concentrated in trying to evade all the attacks, the music did not bother me much at all. On the other hand the sound effects were made with great effort, and some of them are really funny. This is a must play game, it offers you a lot of fun and it requires great ability.

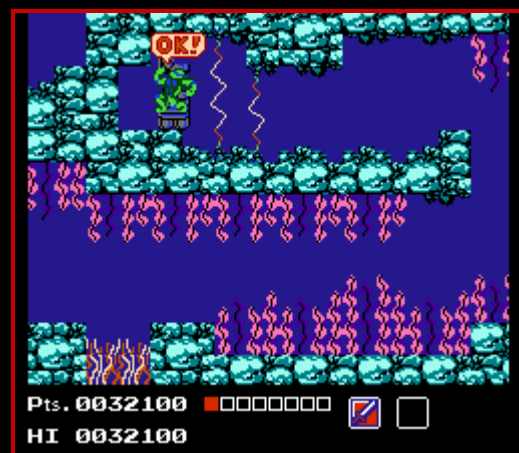
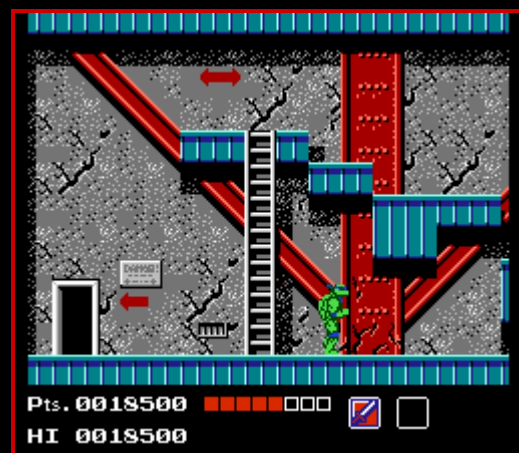
CARLOS HERNANDEZ

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

The first time I played this game was around 1991 or '92, when my brother and I were visiting a friend and didn't have any new games, so we decided to rent one. The only game available that we hadn't played yet was Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, so we thought we would try it out and see for ourselves. We were pretty impressed with the graphics, music, and sound effects from the start...

There is a cool cut-scene that plays from the title screen if you let it sit for a few seconds, and it gives you a little background on what's happening with the game. April has been captured by Shredder and the Foot Clan, and it's up to you to find and save her. The game starts you out in some type of city environment that you can navigate around in, entering manholes or buildings with opened doors. You'll find some pretty interesting level designs and a lot of enemies when you start exploring these places, as well as a lot of dead ends.

You should be careful when you roam topside while going between buildings and the sewers, because members of the Foot Clan patrol on foot and in vehicles, and can really mess you up if you don't know how to take them down. Throughout the game you can choose between all four turtles (Leonardo, Donatello, Michelangelo, and Raphael) and there can be a bit of strategy involved in who you use... All the turtles have a life meter, and when the meter runs out they become "captured", so you should be real careful about getting hit. The best thing to do when everyone's life is running low is to locate a spot with some pizza, and repeatedly enter the level over and over to fill everyone back up to full health, it's best to use places where pizza is at the entrance...



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The best way to decide which turtle is best for a certain job is to understand his strengths and weaknesses. Leonardo uses Katana's, which have decent range and are fast hitting, but have only a medium range of attack power. Donatello uses the Bo, which while slow moving, can also inflict a great deal of damage to multiple enemies, at extremely long range. Raphael uses the Sai, which has extremely short range but very nice hitting power, and Michelangelo uses Nunchukus; they are useful for bosses and the like for their slightly longer range than the Sai, and decent hitting power. You will also be able to use a few other bonus weapons, such as boomerangs and throwing stars.

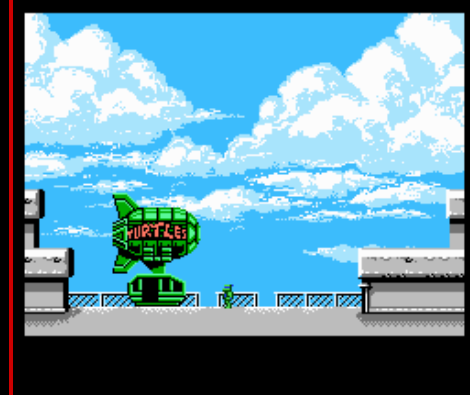
The graphics seem to be pretty cool when it comes down to the bottom line, and the artists did a good job of representing the turtles and their various enemies throughout the entire game. The level artwork was

also well done, and the environments look great. The music is also decent, but not a lot to brag about... It was good for its time, but even when compared to other titles of the day it can be a little repetitive. The gameplay and control aren't bad at all however, and as you will find, the turtles have no problems being responsive and doing what you need them to do. The low and high jumps are especially neat, and once you learn how to use them, they will prove to be a valuable asset to your strategy with certain enemies, bosses, and obstacles.

I found quite a few of the earliest levels in the game to be pretty easy, as well as the first two real bosses you get to fight, Bebop, and Rocksteady... They are mutants just like the turtles, but they have some intelligence issues that need to be worked out. Bebop can be dispatched with easily by using Michelangelo, and Rocksteady can also be dealt with rather easily by using Donatello if you know where to place him. After you progress a bit and take out Rocksteady, you will have freed April, however the game doesn't end here! Now you have to defuse some bombs under a river, and the task won't be easy, on account of the sea weed. There are a few times of sea weed, some will just hurt you, some will grab you and pull you down, and some will try to electricute you. You will also have to contend with some electrical charges running through the water, as well as some spinning "fireball" type things, that are located in junctions points.



After proceeding past this point you will eventually come to find that Shredder has no decided to kidnap your master, Splinter. You will visit quite a few other places by the time you have made it to the end of the game, but most of them are relatively fun, I did not like the really long journey through the seventeen sewer tunnels however... The final part of the game will leave you inside the Technodrome, and there



will be tons of challenges for you. When you do make it to Shredder, you should try to defeat him quickly, using Donatello's Bo to make him fall back, and if you have any special weapons saved used them up too. Don't let him hit you, or it could be curtains, as he takes a lot of life bars when he attacks you. I wasn't too impressed with the ending to be honest, after all they made such a great game, why bother with an ending, right?

CARLOS HERNANDEZ

Super CastleVania IV

Super CastleVania IV is the first CastleVania game released for the SNES. The main character is once again Simon Belmont, who many should remember from earlier CastleVania games. This game is more of a remake of the first CastleVania than anything, however it is believed that the American version was changed somewhat, with a modified story and other minor details to make it appear to be a sequel to CastleVania II: Simon's Quest.

Super CastleVania IV is a 2D scrolling game with beautiful gothic environment, stunning graphics, a variety of bosses and sub-bosses, and features an awesome soundtrack, as well as great sound effects. Simon features several new moves, including a whip that uses diagonal attacks, which can also be used for swinging across ledges; and also features the secondary weapons we all know and love, including daggers, holy water, axes, boomerangs and of course, the stopwatch.

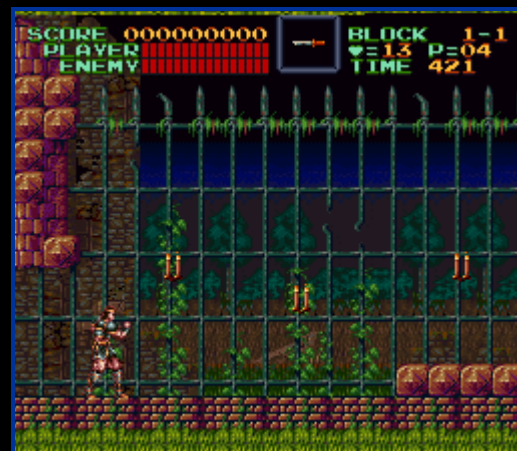
The game consists of eleven stages, and some are really fun and challenging (like stage 4), while others seem more boring and humdrum (stage 3). As in other CastleVania games your mission is to save the countryside from Count Dracula's menace, but there isn't very much to really say about the game beyond this. The game plays pretty much like other CastleVania games, however some view the fact you can't play multiple characters as a step backwards...



The battle with Dracula may be a little predictable, or easy for some, as he only uses a few tactics over and over. He will use teleporting moves and throw fireballs at you, and doesn't appear to transform into any monstrous forms, it seems only his head changes, but he is still very powerful in this form. There is a trick you can use that will allow you to destroy him easily as well. Just before going up into the castle keep, fall off the ledge and you'll land on an invisible platform, once there you will receive an ample supply of items such as hearts, morning stars, and other goodies.

Super CastleVania IV is my favorite CastleVania game for the SNES, because it's more complete and challenging than Dracula X (at least I feel so), and I enjoyed playing it immensely. Everything about this game is good, from the colorful gothic art, to the stunning soundtrack, it is a must play for all CastleVania fans.

JAVIER PANTE



Super Mario RPG

Super Mario RPG is nothing short of a good fun game. When I first heard about it, I had mixed feelings. "Mario ? In an RPG? What?", I thought. After all, who ever heard of Mario in a role-playing game? He was the icon of action platformers. I also have to admit that I didn't like the game much at first, because of the "simplistic" and "kiddy" nature of the whole deal. Over time the game grew on me however, and I enjoy playing it through every once in a while.

As mentioned before the game itself is pretty simplistic, despite some perceived shortcomings, it is also what makes the game so enjoyable to play. Like any role-playing game Mario RPG is chock full of melodrama and quasi-humorous events. The game starts off with our trusty hero Mario infiltrating Bowser's castle to try and rescue the princess as per usual, however the story now takes a sharp turn. Shortly after some fighting a huge sword crashes into the castle and sends everyone flying in different directions. Mario conveniently lands in his pipe house where toad is, and at this point the game really begins.

You'll start off working your way through different areas to get to the Mushroom Kingdom, so you can tell the Chancellor what happened with the Princess. Along the way you will be introduced to familiar enemies and have the chance to get some practice in with the games combat system. The combat system itself is very easy to get used to, and functions like one you might find in most other RPG's. You can attack, use magic (or in this case special moves), defend or run, and use items. There are many items and abilities in the game that will allow you to raise party members from the dead, restore HP, restore FP (flower points, for special moves) to the party, and boost attack and defense, as well as cure ailments. I really like the concept of timed attacks as well, which work by hitting the correct button at the right moment just before you hit an enemy, effectively boosting your attack damage. This concept also carries over into special abilities. Hitting buttons at certain times, or in rapid succession can greatly boost the effect of a given ability from simple damage output, to HP restoration. Though I am not completely certain, I believe you can also try to "time" enemy attacks so you can take less damage as well.

Overall the game world is presented beautifully. Whether you are trudging down a dirt path, walking through a forest maze, swimming through a sunken ship, or exploring underground, the visuals will keep you pleased. The sound effects I wish were a little better, but they do fit the atmosphere of the game, and go well in hand with the music. This is a kids game after all. Like any good RPG, Mario RPG also has mini games. A lot of them are pretty fun, while others seem kind of trivial. I think the one that stands out the most is the mine cart mini-game, which seems to borrow a bit of gameplay from Super Mario Kart.

I have to say I felt the game was limited in a few respects. Item capacity is limited big time. You seem to only be able to hold a finite amount of items, which can sometimes make it hard to choose when you need to stock up. Do you want more mushrooms or able juice? What about Maple Syrup? Pick-me-ups ? It forces the player to perform a careful balancing act involving which items they think they will need the most. Another shortcoming is the equipment menu. When you buy equipment it simply tells you who can use it. It doesn't let you compare "on the fly", and it can be a real waste of money unless you go look up everything online

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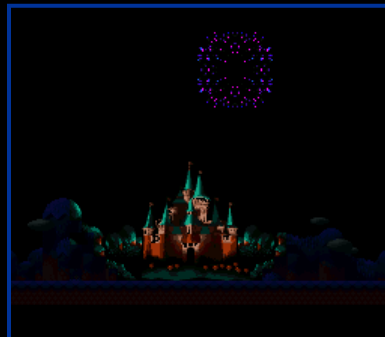
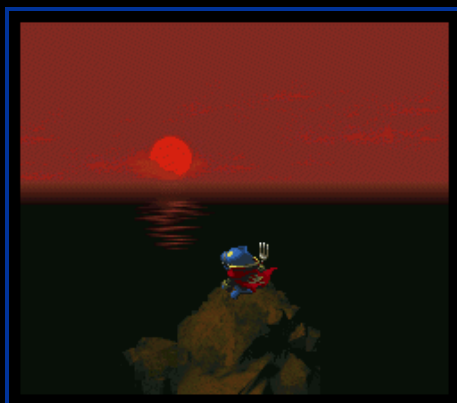


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or in a book. There is also a coin limit of 999 at any given time, which kind of defeats the purpose of "saving up". You can always get more coins, but 999 seems like such a limited number. Given Square's reputation at this point in time, I have to wonder if they really thought these things over.

All in all, Mario RPG is a very fun game to play, and despite its shortcomings there are many memorable moments. There is a cameo by Link (of Zelda fame), as well as 8-bit Mario, and a pretty funny moment when Bowser and Booster kiss Mario as well. The only thing that kind of "stuck out" was Princess Toadstool. She has a lot of spunk, and I suppose its the only game where she has a lot of dialogue too, so that took some getting used to. Overall I'd say this is a great game worth playing, and is a great game for people who have never played RPG's but want to be introduced to the concept. Fun for all ages, and plenty of laughs. As a special feature I'm going to do something I normally don't with my others reviews and include a lot of extra screen captures. There really are a lot of memorable moments throughout the game, as well as some cool credit captures.

ZACHARY BARTELS



Zero - The Kamikaze Squirrel



At first glance, Zero is another vanilla platformer for the SNES, however I think its a pretty solid game. Zero seems to have borrowed ideas from a lot of different games, and then combined those ideas into one single game, and this is the strong point. The controls are pretty easy to grasp from the start of the game, and there are several button configurations available, overall though you only need to use about three buttons during the course of the game. This makes the game extremely appealing to me as a platformer because simplicity means fun in most cases.

At first the game feels a lot like the Jazz Jackrabbit series, speedily sending you through the levels and reacting to button pushes very fast. The environments are pretty well done and provide an overall fun atmosphere to zip around in. I think one of the best things about Zero is

that you can fly around for a short amount of time. A lot of the challenges in the game actually involve flying around, and many of the bonus areas include places for you to practice this skill. Another great ability is the double jump. You can launch zero into the air as per usual by pushing the jump button, and then hit it a second time to go into a "rolling" sort of extension to the jump. If you tap the jump button quickly when first doing a jump you can actually jump a little bit higher than normal, and if you just need that extra distance you can time the double jump for that as well.

Another neat feature of the environments, which reminded me of Sonic, are the "spring-like" platforms that can be found in various levels. In the first stage you can bounce off of certain trees. Expanding on the spring mechanics, is the ability to jump higher and higher. You can time this with your double jump ability to reach very nice heights which is good for finding hidden areas, or good for launching yourself so that you can fly around for a bit. There are many more combinations you can use throughout the game to get to hard to reach places, or kill enemies, but I think the most useless move would be the one on the L+R buttons. Basically a summersault type move, hitting the corresponding button will either launch you forward or backwards. I can see the potential of a backwards summersault being used to escape enemies you may run at too fast, but otherwise I didn't use the moves at all.

I really like the life system that the game employs. You start off each level with a set amount of "Z" energy. When you take a hit your energy is taken away (naturally) and you will die when you run out of "Z" energy. "Z" energy can be replenished if you know where to look in most levels, and is also available in some bonus areas. Extra lives are also found in the same manner. When you die, you either restart the level, or start at the half-way point, assuming you found one. Sometimes there will be several half-way points in the same level, usually either before or right after a tough obstacle which may prove troublesome to go through over and over.

Overall Zero is a fun game worth playing, and provides quite a few hours challenges. The controls are very well done and responsive, and the music and visuals are pretty normal. One last recommendation I will make is that you not play the Sega Genesis version. It really sucks.



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The graphics do seem slightly different, but what really sticks out are the control changes and the music. Zero on the Genesis really highlights the weak points of Sega's sound chip of choice. Even the sound effects are horrible. Thankfully the SNES version of the game is great, and lots of fun. I recommend it to everyone.

ZACHARY BARTELS

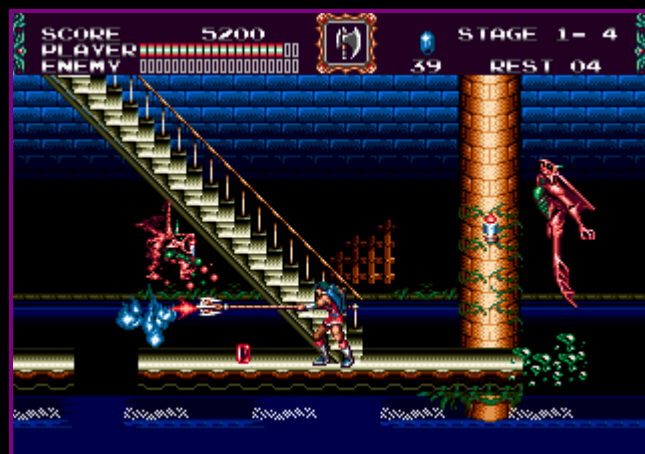
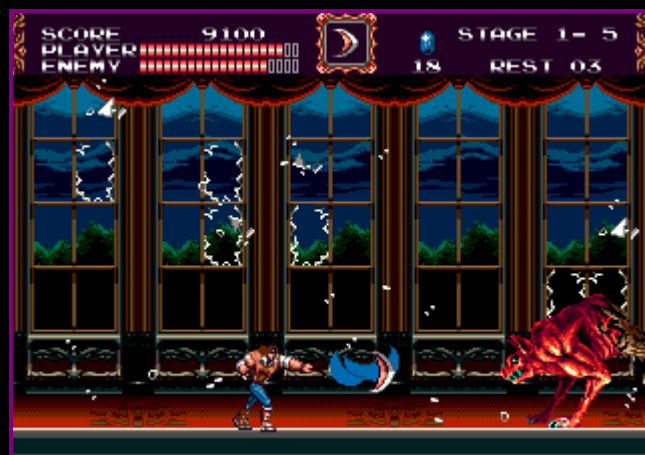


CastleVania: Bloodlines

CastleVania: Bloodlines, is another installment in the popular series by Konami that is by now, home to about eight-billion games. Not straying too far from the original formula for this one was a smart choice, though, as Bloodlines just further improves on an already great series of games. The story does not involve Belmonts for a change and instead, focuses on their ancestors, John Morris and Eric Lecarde. It seems an evil Countess by the name of Elizabeth Bartley seeks to revive Dracula, and needs the help of dark powers from all other Europe to do it... As John or Eric, you will travel to these various locations and put an end to the forces brewing there. I don't know how many times Dracula will die and come back to life, but as long as the games are this fun, I won't complain...

Bloodlines benefits from being set in different areas, because each level looks and feels quite different from the others, they are a little more enjoyable to play. All the backgrounds look nice and disturbing, with dead bodies, swinging blades and all sorts of gloomy imagery. The monsters are all drawn and animated nicely and fit the theme well, whether they are collapsing in blue flames or exploding into a shower of bones and body parts. Most of the bosses were especially fun to come across, with my favorite being the stone boss at the end of the water area. This particular boss was a giant column of rock, and as you bust it away, it crumbles and makes his body shorter and shorter until you can reach his head. I've always been a fan of "breakaway" bosses, and little extra touches like this help keep the fighting from being the same straight-forward task each time.

The music has always been an impressive part of the CastleVania series, and Bloodlines is no different. From the moment I turned the game on and hit the creepy title screen tune, I knew that Konami had done it again. Some of the tracks throughout the game, particularly the slower and deeper ones, sound like they could be lifted right from an old horror flick. Even the fast paced songs in most of the levels have just the right feel... I don't really know how to explain it, but given the setting of the game, all the music just seems to fit in and complement it well. Of course, I would expect no less from the folks that brought us Bemani.



It's not just about looking and sounding good, though, and when the time comes for you to lay waste to everything, the tight controls make it simple and fun. Each of the characters has their own weapon and technique to go along with it, mildly affecting how you can play. John has the trademark whip, and can use it to swing from walls and ceilings, while Eric has a spear which can be used to stab at angles and vault into the air. When it comes to actual battle however, the two characters feel mostly the same, and you'll be stabbing and cracking in no time. Don't forget the usual special weapons which are still around... These extra tools include axes, boomerangs, and my personal favorite, the holy water. While these are cool to have around, their usefulness is lim-

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ited in most cases, and a well trained finger will be better used on the whip or spear.

If you have played any of the other classic CastleVania titles, then you should already know what to expect. Good controls, moderate difficulty, and the fantastic moods and overall design make this another winner, and while there is ultimately nothing new to see here, Bloodlines still stands as another example of why Konami was always one of the best.

ERIC LADD



Shadow Dancer: The Secret of Shinobi



I'm not sure about other people out there but I just want a game that is direct, simple, and just plain fun. I'm not one to complain, but do platformers nowadays have just too much to do? Collect crystals, get the gems, and since we're gathering stuff, why don't we collect those rare relics as well? If you're not getting this, I'm being sarcastic... First time, it was fun, second time it's a challenge, the third time, it's getting to be a bore... The fourth time? Well, you get the picture. Enter Shadow Dancer. The first Genesis game I ever played and kept coming back for more. This game is just too sweet!

Shadow Dancer doesn't have any gimmicks, revolutionary design or outrageous graphics. What it does have is a simple yet fun gameplay objectives; slash and shuriken your way out of each level. I know it sounds boring but you have to play it to know it. Basically, the city of New York has come under the gloom of a secret organization aptly named Union Lizard. You play as Shinobi, and have to stop the doom that has befallen on the citizens of the city (naturally). The story is kind of crappy, but nobody cared back in 1990. What really matter were the game mechanics. Levels are broken down into three sub-stages, the final stage being a showdown between Shinobi and the boss for that level. You're thrown into each sub-stage with 1 simple objective: rescue the citizens, kill all the baddies and beat the time clock. Well, that was three actually but who's counting? In between stages, there are bonus levels where Shinobi jumps from a ledge and rains down a plethora of shurikens on red

ninjas. Not much to write home about... What's really innovative is the white dog that you could tell to attack/distract the enemy. Too bad it appeared only in this single game...

The levels are infested with so many enemies (especially in hard mode), that it would take countless practice just to finish one run. Shinobi being killed in just 1 hit doesn't make it any simpler either, but that was what I liked about this game. No pretences, hidden motives nor gimmicks. Just get the ninja from point A to point B. Now I know that those reading this must think that I'm just some poor sap who sucks and loves linear, crappy story-line games, but

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play this in hard mode, and then tell me if your opinion still stands... This is one tough mother and only Contra beats it in terms of difficulty. Luckily, the tight controls and the perfect layout of the Genesis controller makes the trip a bit easier. Graphics-wise, the sprites were distinct and suitably colored but the enemies could have been much more diverse. Slaying the same old baddies for the umpteenth time just kills off your brain, thankfully, bosses are different each time and are beautifully represented and huge (especially the final boss). Like all games for the Genesis, except for a few notable ones, the audio in this game is downright bad, though I'm much more forgiving to games that came out in the early 90's. Readers, give this baby a chance. Get the game any way you can, I promise it will be good for you. Happy shuriken-ing!

STYLEY

